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Date

The Four Stages of Relationships

or

The Joys of a Brand-New Car

While growing up, all young children get advice from older, wiser adults who think they have the best advice in the world. In my case, it seemed as if the advice I received was always “don’t ever get married.” For a long time, I thought that this advice had to be good information, but after being in a relationship for over three years, I thought that I had found a way to beat this depressing advice. However, things can definitely change, and in my case they certainly did. Throughout my high school years and into my first year of college, I was going steady with one girl, and we progressed through all the stages of a relationship. However, all that I got out of it was a nice-looking wallet, a head full of memories, and proof that “don’t ever get married” might really be the best advice in the world.

While psychologists and relationship experts have clinical, important names for the stages of a relationship, my stage names relate to how I personally felt during each stage. The first stage of a relationship is the “I wanna be with you all the time” stage. This stage occurs early in the relationship and can consist of the first couple of dates. Most relationships go through this stage, and it seems to be comprised of fairly good times for both involved, primarily because the relationship is like a new car: it is better than the last one, and its capabilities are still unknown. The price of gasoline it costs to drive the car does not matter because everybody

sees it and wants one just like it. During this stage, the couple has no inkling of the problems that may occur later: fighting, stress, and jealousy.

The next stage of a relationship, in my experience, can be classified as the “I think I’m in love” stage. In most relationships, this stage is the second stage; however, some couples seem to jump straight to this stage. During this stage, the relationship seems to grow deeper, and things start to get complicated. The four little letters in the word *love* really throw the relationship into another level. Both partners in the relationship seem to start saying crazy things like “I could see myself with you for the rest of my life” and “Wouldn’t our babies be pretty!” Trips to Arby’s seem to always turn into a drive past bridal shops. During this stage, an evil seed seems to be sprouting into weeds of jealousy because stressful situations become more frequent and the fights begin.

After the “I think I’m in love” stage, the relationship starts to head downhill as it enters the “We’re getting really close, but there are so many more fish in the sea” stage. This stage tends to be a little more rocky than the previous two stages. The couple starts to see major flaws in each other, and suddenly the girl walking across campus in the miniskirt is the hottest thing in the world. This stage involves several relationship killers: fighting, name-calling, and jealousy that turns into borderline stalking.

Finally, the last stage of a relationship is “Are you really the last person I’m gonna be with forever?” stage. During this stage both members of the relationship realize what is really going on with the other, and they come to the conclusion that they can do much better. The “new car” fascination is gone when you realize the car does have its knocks and pings and it’s not the prettiest one in town anymore. Now the trade-in value is starting to look pretty good. Several four-letter words come to mind besides *love* when thinking about one’s partner.

After progressing through all four of these relationship stages, one of two things happens: the couple cuts the losses and breaks up, or they remain miserable for a while longer. It's at this point that the sage advice I received all my life, "don't ever get married," sounds like music to my ears. However, I realize that the best thing about buying new cars is all the test drives you get to take until deciding on the perfect one.